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MEMORANDUM

TO : Records

FROM : W. David Slawson WDS

SUBJECT : Conference with the CIA on March 12, 1964

At 11:00 a.m., on March 12, 1964 the following individuals gathered in J. Lee Rankin's office to confer on how best the CIA and the Commission could work together at this juncture to facilitate the remaining work of the Commission: J. Lee Rankin, Howard P. Willens, William T. Coleman, Jr., Samuel A. Stern, Burt Griffin, W. David Slawson, Richard Helms, and Raymond Rocca, the latter three from the CIA. The meeting lasted until about 1:15 p.m.

The Commission's staff members pointed out to the CIA that we had developed materials which might be of help to the CIA in assessing the Russian situation, in particular, the testimony of Marina Oswald, Robert Oswald, Marguerite Oswald, John Martin and other witnesses scheduled to appear before the Commission. Mr. Rankin pointed out that it was established Commission policy that transcripts of testimony were not to be taken out of the offices of the Commission but that we would of course make these transcripts available in our offices to CIA representatives. It was agreed that a CIA man would come over in the near future to read these transcripts, especially Marina's, and that they would contact either

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The first topic of conversation was Yuri Nosenko, the recent Soviet defector. A general discussion was held on this problem, with the CIA's recommendation being that the Commission await further developments.

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David Slawson or William T. Coleman, Jr. before getting into the transcripts. Slawson or Coleman would be able to point out to the CIA what other testimony besides Marina's might be relevant to the foreign areas and why.

Next, Slawson mentioned that we also had prepared a memorandum, with accompanying exhibits, on Lee Oswald's and Marina Oswald's contacts with the State Department and the Immigration and Naturalization Service. This memorandum was primarily intended for the internal use of the Commission in analyzing what the Oswalds were doing at various times and how their entry into the United States and other foreign travel and attempts at foreign travel were processed by our government agencies. We suggested that the memorandum might also have value as a tool in spotting clues of possible Russian subversion or intelligence, as these factors may have interferred with or affected State Department procedures. Consequently, we would deliver a copy of the memorandum to the CIA and also a statement of certain specific questions which we felt were raised by the memorandum and its supporting materials.

In discussing the State Department's files, Coleman and Slawson drew particular attention to paragraph 5 of the memorandum on special questions which we presented to the CIA. (A copy of this memorandum is attached to this memorandum of the conference.) Question No. 5 concerns the suspicious coincidence between the message from the State Department at Washington to its American Embassy in Moscow transmitting Marguerite Oswald's statement of concern for her son, Lee Harvey, on the one hand,

and the letter from Lee Harvey Oswald in Minsk to the American Embassy in Moscow announcing his intention to return to the United States, after fourteen (14) months of silence, on the other. CIA agreed that this coincidence seemed significant but could offer nothing else on it during the conference.

While on the general subject of the State Department, Mr. Rocca mentioned that an article had recently appeared in "Human Events," a little-known periodical, speculating on the meaning of a certain telegram concerning Lee Oswald sent through internal channels of the State Department. Mr. Rocca said that the article was of interest only because it showed that there might be a serious leak in our security some place, since the detail which it contained about this telegram was both substantial and accurate. He could not remember what telegram the article discussed but promised to contact Slawson later and fill him in on the situation. (Slawson has since reported that late on the afternoon of March 12 Rocca telephoned and told him that the telegram was number 234 and that the article on it first appeared in the Northern Virginia Sun on February 28, 1964 in a column by "Allen and Scott," and that the "Human Events" article was simply a summary and rehash of the Northern Virginia Sun article. Rocca said that he would mail both articles to Slawson. While on the telephone with Rocca, Slawson told him that he [Slawson] had some ideas on how this leak might have occurred and that if the newspaper article bore out Slawson's suspicions in this respect he would notify Rocca by telephone and the two of them could then meet informally to discuss it. Rocca agreed.)

The conversation then turned to Mexico. We first asked the CIA what they meant by the reference to "the other lead being followed by the FBI" in their second memorandum on Mexico. They answered to the effect that this was the request given to them by the FBI to give a polygraph test to a certain individual, this being the "Diaz Verson" episode. We replied to the effect that we were fully aware of the episode and since one of the principal characters involved in it had recently recanted his former statements we were tentatively closing the investigation.

Mr. Rankin, Mr. Slawson, Mr. Willens, and Mr. Coleman all expressed concern over the inability of the Commission or any of the governmental agencies to fill in the very large gaps still existing in Lee Harvey Oswald's visit to Mexico. We pointed out that there were many days during which we knew nothing about his whereabouts and that the evenings of his entire trip were unaccounted for. Furthermore, the testimony of the hotel clerk at the del Comercio Hotel seemed to us highly unsatisfactory. The clerk admitted that the hotel registry showed the name of Oswald, but he completely denies any other memory whatever of Oswald's being at the hotel, and all the subordinate hotel personnel such as cleaning ladies, etc., likewise deny any memory of Oswald. The desk clerk has furnished the names of some individuals who roomed near Oswald at the hotel and stated that they were "well known" to him, the hotel clerk. However, attempts to trace down these individuals have so far been unsuccessful. One is allegedly an officer in the Mexican Army from Veracruz. Yet, neither the Mexican Army nor any of the usual contacts, such as the

police, the local American Consulate, etc., in this section of Mexico have ever heard of anyone by that name. The CIA expressed some surprise at this. We also discussed the new information which had just come to light indicating that Oswald may after all not have taken a bus from Mexico City back to the American border but may have reserved a place on the bus and then never taken it, going by automobile instead. We also briefly summarized the results of the FBI's investigation on this point.

We then discussed what would be the best method for the Commission to try to fill the gaps in its knowledge about Mexico. Mr. Helms agreed that it might be useful for members of the Commission's staff to go to Mexico City to deal directly with representatives of the FBI, CIA, Secret Service, Narcotics, Embassy and the local Mexican law-enforcement agencies. He said that the Commission, by its nature, was in a good position to bypass ordinary government channels and get things done by dealing directly with the persons involved. He felt that the reception from the Mexican authorities would be better if they were approached on an informal, personal level and made to understand that we were asking their help on a man-to-man basis rather than government-to-government. Mr. Helms commented that he felt that the Mexican government, qua government, might be in a defensive posture about this whole problem and therefore somewhat less willing to cooperate than the individuals who made up its law-enforcement branches. We also discussed whether Commission representatives should go to Mexico City incognito or officially and openly,

and it was decided to defer this decision until more facts were known. It was felt, however, that it was better in cases of doubt to start at a very low level and then, if necessary, become more open and official as the circumstances warranted; a change in this direction is possible, whereas a change in the other direction is not.

The conversation then shifted back to Russia. We asked the members of the CIA whether they had received copies of the letters written by Lee Oswald while he was in Russia and later, in particular, letters to his brother, Robert, to his mother, Marguerite Oswald, and to various American government agencies, such as the American Embassy in Moscow.

and Rocca answered that they believed they had all such materials. Later, however, Mr. Slawson mentioned that he nevertheless intended to forward copies of the most recent group of letters from Lee Harvey Oswald to his mother to the CIA just in case they had not received these already. Mr. Slawson commented that these letters had come in quite recently and it is just possible that they missed going to the CIA. CIA representatives agreed that, as a precaution, these letters should be sent to them. It was also mentioned that the CIA might not have seen one of the preliminary drafts of the letter to the Russian Embassy written after Oswald returned from Mexico which has fairly recently come into possession of the Commission. CIA representatives said that they had not seen this draft, and Mr. Rankin asked Mr. Slawson to be sure to get them a copy.

There was then a short discussion on the possibility that the letters Lee Oswald wrote to the American Embassy in Moscow while he was trying to get permission for himself and his wife Marina to return to the United States might have been "coached." Mr. Coleman especially expressed the opinion that these letters reflected a higher degree of sophistication and knowledge of passport procedures than would be expected of a man of Lee Harvey Oswald's known character. Following this there ensued a short discussion of the manner in which CIA might use its Russian defectors, including Nosenko, in evaluating the information we had on the Oswalds' connections with the Soviet authorities. When asked whether the FBI and the Secret Service were continuing to forward materials to the CIA as the Commission had previously requested, the CIA representatives replied in the affirmative.

During the meeting a background memorandum prepared by Messrs. Hubert and Griffin of the Commission staff relating to Jack Ruby was delivered to the CIA representatives. We asked that they review this memorandum and report to the Commission, especially with regard to Ruby's one or more trips to Cuba. They stated that this would be done.

In response to an inquiry from Mr. Willens regarding the Commission letter to CIA dated February 12, 1964, relating to a photograph secured through CIA and shown by the FBI and Mrs. Marguerite Oswald, the CIA representatives stated that they would check into it and contact Mr. Willens.

It was also agreed that materials not already furnished but within the Commission's request, and not presenting these problems of security, would be furnished in their original form. This would include the CIA communications to other federal agencies on October 16, 1963.

Mr. Helms also indicated that, before the trip to Mexico City, Oswald's conduct did not warrant the concern of CIA, nor, would he imagine, the serious concern of other federal law-enforcement or intelligence agencies. The significant point to the CIA of the Mexico City trip was not the visit to the Soviet Embassy, but the aspects relating to Oswald's desire to go to Cuba. However, even this information would not have been regarded as very significant.

Mr. Helms said that the CIA's report on the Mexico City trip to the other federal agencies concerned would have been made routinely even if the CIA had no prior file on Oswald and no indication of the interest of the other agencies. Hence, the fact that the report was made does not indicate that the CIA regarded this information as of a priority nature.

According to the CIA representatives, there is a continuing flood of intelligence information of this level of importance, and it is therefore not difficult to understand why the CIA messages regarding Oswald's trip to Mexico did not provoke requests for further information or a major investigative effort. In evaluating the significance of the information concerning Oswald, without benefit of hindsight, they stated that it is important to remember that Oswald had committed no crime, had displayed no predilection for violence, and had never been identified as a member of any organization regarded as a possible source of danger or violence.

The meeting then adjourned at about 1:15 p.m.

There was also some discussion of the issue as to whether Oswald was an agent for the CIA. The CIA representatives denied that such was the case, and indicated that Messrs. Helms and were the persons who would know of any such relationship. Mr. Rankin informed the CIA representatives of the Commission's desire to secure from CIA additional assurances of this fact, as had already been done in the case of other agencies. The CIA representatives stated that they were confident that Mr. McCone or any other representatives of CIA would submit any affidavit desired by the Commission and/or pursue the matter with Mr. Dulles in any way the Commission wished.

At some point during the conference, we questioned the CIA on their pre-assassination contacts with Oswald and their communication with other government agencies concerning these contacts. Mr. Helms explained that the CIA had excluded from Oswald file furnished to the Commission all materials regarding the October 9 and 10 messages because these were summarized in CIA memorandum of January 31, 1964, and because internal messages utilized confidential communications techniques and revealed confidential sources. Commission representatives explained that the Commission did not need to know these confidential aspects, but needed more than the summary afforded by CIA memorandum.

After discussion, it was agreed that the CIA would supply the Commission a paraphrase of any message or other writing requested by the Commission, the original version of which would reveal a confidential source or a confidential communications technique. The actual messages would be reviewed with members of the Commission staff, to enable them to give assurance that the paraphrases are complete and accurate.